How Philosophical Worldviews Influence Perspectives of Autonomy, Heteronomy, & Politics

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"Our principles fix what our life stands for, our aims create the light our life is bathed in, and our rationality, both individual and coordinate, defines and symbolizes the distance we have come from mere animality. It is by these means that our lives come to more than what they instrumentally yield. And by meaning more, our lives yield more." -Robert Nozick

Introduction

Ideas of people, government, politics, religion, and our perception of the world are heavily influenced by family and schools. Much like ordinary socialization skills are acquired by children through experiences and direction of family and adult figures, the same is true for political socialization and overall worldview.

The way children learn how to respond to different ideas, engage in civil discourse, and handle objection or rejection, are first taught in the home and school. Sometimes these lessons conflict with one another, which can exacerbate a child's learning curve potential.

To avoid or overcome many of the inconsistencies and difficulties that arise from philosophical incoherence, one must understand how one views their own existence in the world and how one views others in relation to oneself.

There are several ways to view one's existence in the world. In this essay, I will go over four (4) predominant philosophical views of a person's existence, or human nature, to provide clarity. These views are embodied in *hard determinism*, *soft determinism*, *free will*, and *metaphysical libertarianism*.

Next, I will demonstrate how these views of existence play a significant role in how a person views their relationship with others, especially as they correlate to political ethics and authority. Two of these prevailing

ethical and authoritative perspectives include *heteronomy* and *autonomy*.

Hard Determinism

“Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect, as well as for the star.” - Albert Einstein

Hard determinism, sometimes referred to as *incompatibilism*, is the belief that external factors predetermine all human existence and behavior. According to advocates of hard determinism, the factors that determine behavior may include a variety of causal factors such as a person's DNA, God or a deity, the universe, stars, society, environment, chemicals, psychology, government, past and present time, astrological signs, or when or where they are born. There are likely even more belief systems that embrace a rigidly deterministic view of human nature.

Overall, hard determinism holds that every event and action in the universe is causally inevitable. Thus, hard determinism denies free will and individual moral responsibility. This view effectively removes a sense of personal responsibility.

A typical example of hard determinism is a person's success or failure in life as predetermined by outside factors that are unchangeable by the person. Believers of hard determinism suggest that no matter how hard a person tries or what they do, whatever their outcome is, it is already predetermined and the results are to be accepted as being *meant to be*. Hard determinists believe that any resistance to that destiny, good or bad, is futile and performed in vanity.

Soft Determinism

"Man can do what he wills but he cannot will what he wills." - Arthur Schopenhauer

Soft determinism, sometimes referred to as *compatibilism*, is the belief that the universe is already determined but people have free will to act within those given predeterminations. This is the notion that determinism and free will are compatible with one another. These soft deterministic causal factors are the same as aforementioned with hard determinism. The common belief of soft determinists is that as long as external forces are not actively forcing the determined narrative, the person has free will to act within given circumstances.

Overall, soft determinism holds that most events and actions in the universe are causally inevitable. This view creates a subjectively arbitrary perspective on the personal responsibility of individuals.

An ordinary example of soft determinism is a person's choice when given options to choose from. Proponents of philosophical soft determinism believe that a culmination of a person's environment, DNA, the way they were raised, past experiences, and actions taken, among other factors, cause a person to

act and choose inevitably according to those preset causal factors. The actions taken within those constraints are what soft deterministsays is a free-will choice but that one's willpower is in alignment with those predetermined factors.

Free Will

“Free will is not the liberty to do whatever one likes, but the power of doing whatever one sees ought to be done, even in the very face of otherwise overwhelming impulse.” - George MacDonald

The philosophical belief in *free will* is that people can make decisions or perform actions completely independently from any prior event or state of the universe. That is to say, free will opposes the concept of predetermination. Free will philosophy views everyone as morally responsible for themselves. Patrons of free will hold that no matter a person’s DNA, when or where they are born, environment, society, constraints, the universe, God or deity, etc., people can think independently and act independently.

This view holds that a person can use reason and logic to learn from their experience and the experiences of others. This view also holds each individual ultimately personally responsible for their own thoughts and actions.

An example of free will is a person actively choosing to improve their life in the face of difficulty and sacrifice. A person is viewed as having the capacity to choose their end goal and the goals in between to obtain that ultimate goal without real limitation.

Metaphysical Libertarianism

"Liberty not only means that the individual has both the opportunity and the burden of choice; it also means that he must bear the consequences of his actions. Liberty and responsibility are inseparable." -F.A. Hayek

Metaphysical libertarianism is like a fusion of nature and nurture. This philosophy accepts the possibility of external and internal causal influences, while proponents of metaphysical libertarianism hold that free will is incompatible with determinism itself. External factors may include environment, DNA, events, time, location, God or deity, etc. Internal factors may include free will within those given circumstances and the individual subjective value-based decisions of the person. Metaphysical libertarianism, much like the political philosophy of *libertarianism*, does not deny the individual actor and their ultimate individual willpower. Instead, metaphysical libertarianism maintains an approach of methodological individualism and utilizes praxeology to study human action and logic of choice.

This volition belief system recognizes natural and artificial causes and limitations but maintains that a person can overcome most of the

limitations by strengthening the will within reason. This philosophy does not deny the possibility of luck factors. It does hold a hierarchical scale of choices based on reasoning, among other factors.

Metaphysical libertarianism holds people morally responsible for most, if not all, of their actions. Metaphysical libertarianism is in direct opposition to hard determinism. This view holds

individuals personally responsible and accountable for their actions with some room for consideration of influential external or internal factors.

An example of metaphysical libertarianism is a person pursuing a goal in the face of difficulty, with the recognition that they can choose a number of options that enable them to win, fail, or learn. Their choices are limited to the person's imagination, use of reason, logic, environment, DNA, personality traits, etc., but through proper work, they can possibly discover or create greater choices and reach their ultimate goals. Cooperation as found through reason and division of labor is sometimes utilized to reach goals that have difficulties or barriers for the individual alone.

Heteronomy

"Do as you are told, and everything will be all right." -Norman Jewison

Heteronomy is to take action based on external influence or force. These external causal influences can be from government, society, culture, slave masters, historical necessity, and authority figures, among others. Under heteronomy, the individual's will is subverted by the will of the predominant authority figure(s). The reason for individual action is directed and controlled by heteronomous relations, as opposed to the individual building their use of willpower and reason to make decisions solely on their own accord. In short, heteronomy is associated with rule-following and a general sense of falling in line with authority and its directives. This conditions an individual to act on the whim of desires instead of by reason alone, as a person's moral gauge or moral compass is not strengthened by autonomous action.

Autonomy

"...When we guide our lives by our own pondered thoughts, it then is our life that we are living, not someone else's." -Robert Nozick

Autonomy is to take action based on internal influences based on reason and individual personal authority. Autonomy recognizes the agency of each individual as opposed to social groups materialized and anthropomorphized into pseudo-autonomous beings. With the recognition of the individual and their autonomy, a person naturally builds their moral gauge (or moral compass) along with their capacity to reason. Autonomy leads to greater self-governance. Autonomy encourages greater moral and ethical understanding for the individual while it holds individuals responsible for infringements on others' autonomy. Autonomy instills a sense of freedom, self-direction, and self-confidence.

Synthesis

According to a recent study on the pedagogical and psychological aspects of children, for children to optimally learn they must have a sense of autonomy acquired. Children first learn a

sense of autonomy, or independence, in their home. This psychological development occurs in children around the age of 18 months and continues to develop throughout an active-minded person's life.

The findings of this study suggest that success in learning depends on a child's ability to think clearly and untrammeled, a sense of eagerness to acquire new knowledge, the capacity to adapt to their environment, and the faculty to analyze and act independently.

By properly teaching children to become autonomous individuals, they instill a personal conscience for moral volition and the capacity to reason on their own accord. These character traits enable a child to learn, grow, and adapt much quicker than a person who is taught to be quiet and follow instructions without question. Autonomy gives a person the skills to think on their own without inertly relying on the direction of others.

Autonomy assumes a *dynamic world* of constant change where voluntary cooperation of distinct individuals is necessary for collaborative efforts such as the division of labor. Whereas heteronomy assumes a *static world* that requires a docile homogenous population being controlled by a centralized directive authority.

A person who is molded into a sympathizer of heteronomous controls builds the capacity to successfully submit to authority without question while they become cognitively inept. Learning requires certain brain muscles to function in particular ways, and when people practice being heteronomous their mental muscles naturally strengthen in that capacity. The same is true for autonomous learning in that it also builds particular mental muscles to enable and strengthen the capacity to think and act autonomously.

When children are raised to believe everything in life is predetermined, such as the philosophy of *hard determinism* suggests, a person is more likely to let life pass them by. They will dismiss putting forth much personal effort towards goal setting while simultaneously suggesting whatever is meant to be will be, as a form of fatalism. So, they live life according to their wants and desires while falling in line with the heteronomous directions given to them.

Determinists tend to think in terms of historicity and confirmation bias which work toward an informal fallacy known as *retrospective determinism*. This retrospective fallacy assumes that because something happened under some specific circumstances it was already determined to occur due to those circumstances. Additionally, determinists tend to discredit *free will* advocates by appealing to the *advance of science fallacy.*

This *appeal to scientism fallacy* suggests that because there is continuous *progress* in the sciences to support the concept of *determined causality,* eventually science will *prove* that there is no actual *free will*, therefore determinists claim *free will* does not exist.

Even *soft determinism* echoes the sentiment that human life is causally predetermined whether by universal causality or by a predetermined intention set by a deity. Although this philosophy

claims “free will” is available within a predetermined, preplanned, or predestined life, it is likely to leave most people wondering what the point is in their effort if no matter their decisions their lives are ultimately decided or determined outside of their sphere of control. Both philosophies of *hard determinism* and *soft determinism* effectively work to alienate their adherents from their individual self-control or autonomy.

The concept of ultimate *free will* does a good job of taking humanity and making *man* an abstraction that explores willpower and human action. These formal abstractions enable us to see the highlighted characteristics - and in this case, *man’s* individualistic will. However, the concept of *free will,* as seen through formal abstraction, comes at a sacrifice of innumerable other defining qualities of human nature and reality itself.

Such human characteristics *free will* misses include sociableness, interconnectedness, temporal constraints, an ever-changing dynamic world, natural constraints of choice, and a wide array of definitive natural internal and external limitations of people. Often promoters of *free will* go as far as to utilize the fallacy of a false dichotomy between the philosophical contrasts between *hard determinism* and *free will*. The concept of *free will* effectively denies external and internal examples of limitations, and dismisses people who claim such examples exist. This philosophy acts as a *soft heteronomous* approach to how people are to view themselves and the world around them.

Compare and Contrast

When comparing *hard determinism* with *free will,* it is blatantly obvious that these two ideas are in direct contrast with each other. *Hard determinism* suggests a person’s life is 100% causally determined, while *free will* suggests a person has 100% control over their life. Both of these philosophies conflate their underlying values with a concept of universal human nature.

When comparing *hard determinism* with *metaphysical libertarianism*, it is obvious that libertarianism does not believe free will is compatible with determinism since to be an *agent* implies having *agency*, and having *agency* implies free will within given circumstances. Conversely, *hard determinism* tends to believe in a physical, material, mind that is naturally limited, and confined, and all subsequent thoughts and actions of a person are causally determined as a ripple effect throughout time and universally across all human actions.

When comparing *soft determinism* with *metaphysical libertarianism*, at first glance these may seem similar in the sense that they both maintain natural and artificial limitations while they each express forms of free will. However, *soft determinism* perpetuates a sense of a causally determined life whereas *metaphysical libertarianism* promotes a sense of continuous freedom of will even given acknowledged internal and external limitations to that freedom of thought, choice, or action.

The philosophical views of *hard determinism*, *soft determinism*, and to a lesser degree *free will*, create heteronomous restrictions on the way people view themselves and the world.

Overall, *metaphysical libertarianism* gives the greatest sense of autonomy to an individual by instilling empathy for natural, artificial, internal, and external limitations. While, simultaneously, it denies that people's lives are determined while it does not deny the use of *reason* and *free will*. In fact, the incompatibilist philosophy of *metaphysical libertarianism* bolsters a sense of personal responsibility and necessarily invigorates autonomous thought and action.

Politically speaking, *hard determinists* and *soft determinists* tend to be more heteronomous in their approach to politics. While proponents of *free will* and *metaphysical libertarianism* tend to be more autonomous in their approach to politics.

Corresponding Political Philosophy Chart

If given a political compass quadrant where movement up the Y-axis is more authoritarian or heteronomous, downward movement on the Y-axis is less authoritarian; and movement along the X-axis determines whether politically left or right-leaning, we could theoretically select four political groups to put into each quadrant of political belief corresponding to their philosophical views.

In Quadrant I (top right) would be Republicans, they would be associated with free will. In Quadrant II (top left) would be Democrats, they would be associated with hard determinism. In Quadrant III (bottom left) would be Socialists, they would be associated with soft determinism. In Quadrant IV (bottom right) would be Libertarians, they would be associated with metaphysical libertarianism.

However, there are limitations to the use of a traditional political quadrant with respect to the philosophical and political views given. Instead, we can turn to another, more realistic, political chart known as a Nolan Chart to provide a greater sense of the political spectrum in relation to these belief systems in relation to authority.

In a Nolan Chart, the graph is tilted so that the bottom right corner of Quadrant IV is pointed downward and the top left corner of Quadrant II is pointed upward. Movement upward in this chart symbolizes more personal and economic freedom or autonomy, and movement downward is more personal and economic authoritarian or heteronomy. Movement left

is more personal freedom, while movement right is more economic freedom. Centrists remain in the middle of the graph.

So, if the very top of the chart, Quadrant II, is the maximization of personal and economic freedom, i.e. autonomy, this section would be for political Libertarians as much as it is for metaphysical libertarianism. On the left side of the chart, in Quadrant III, would be for political Democrats; and on the right side in Quadrant I, would be for political Republicans. Both the

Democrats in Quadrant III and the Republicans in Quadrant I would fall under the category of soft determinism. This puts Socialists in Quadrant IV at the bottom of the chart as being hard determinists and heteronomous. While political centrists, in the middle, will be swayed between varying positions but may theoretically rely on an alternative concept of free will.

What should be obvious here is that not all political views match their corresponding philosophical views 100% of the time, but there are tendencies between them. Some confusion on the U.S. political left and right is created due to the inconsistencies of these political parties and their respective approaches to political philosophy as well as their overall worldviews.

Closing Statements

To conclude, the philosophical position of *metaphysical libertarianism* accepts that there are natural, artificial, internal, and external limitations to the concept of freedom, politics, and autonomy. This view instills the greatest sense of personal responsibility, individualism, and autonomy to think and act independently. If we are to maximize a child's potential in the world as a person of agency, we can neither deny limitations nor the will of the individual. Once a person understands these philosophical views of the world, they are likely to become more autonomous in their own life and in their interactions with others, as well as more libertarian-leaning in their political views.